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## ABSTRACT

This report evaluates the Behavior Change Program, a program in Broward County Public Schools, Florida, that helps severely disruptive elementary school children learn and apply appropriate behaviors. The program is modeled on a level system that moves the student from the self-contained "behavior" classroom to the "regular" classroom based on student performance. Data were collected through a review of project, school, and district records, as well as through observations conducted at a participating elementary school. Interviews were conducted with project staff and school-based and district administrators. A survey was administered to principals and teachers of students who had returned from the program, and a structured telephone interview was conducted with 20 parents (out of 160) whose children had participated in the program. Results indicated that a majority of program staff, parents, principals, and teachers were positive about the program. Principals and teachers reported a success rate of about 50 percent; this rate is expected to rise as results of recent changes in the program take effect. (MM)

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## BEHAVIOR CHANGE PROGRAM: A Successful Approach to Changing the Behavior of Disruptive Elementary Students

### PROGRAM EVALUATION

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## Behavior Change Program Program Evaluation

### Introduction

Educators have reported that disruptive behavior is one of the most common discipline problems (Kaufman & Center, 1992). They recognize that disruptive behavior takes away from the opportunities for learning that should exist in the classroom. For this reason, effective classroom discipline must be an important piece of a quality learning environment.

Educators have developed and implemented discipline plans to minimize disruption in the classroom. Yet, for some children, these plans are not enough. A number of students need to be provided with an intensive and short-term program that supports them as they change their behavior from disruptive to appropriate.

Broward County Public Schools, Florida, has developed, implemented, and evaluated a behavior change model that helps severely disruptive elementary children learn and apply appropriate behaviors. The program is based on a level system that moves the student from the self-contained "behavior" classroom to the "regular" classroom based on student performance. The following evaluation highlights the **"Behavior Change Program."**

### Summary

The Behavior Change Program was established, on a pilot basis, at Nova Blanche Forman Elementary School in October, 1989 as a result of the recognition on the part of school administrators, teachers, and parents, that there is a need to deal more effectively with particular students in our schools. These are students who are defined as disruptive, who do not conform to school rules, who display patterns of academic failure, and who display behaviors that are disturbing to others. In their regular school, these disruptive children detract from the learning atmosphere in the classroom and reduce teacher effectiveness.

The program is designed for students in kindergarten through fifth grade who are less than twelve years old and who have previously exhibited such behavior as truancy, academic failure, problems with parents, and involvement in disruptive behavior in school and the community. The characteristics of the elementary grade student appropriate for this program are those of the under socialized youngster. Students who are appropriate for ESE placements or for whom all efforts to maintain the student in the home school setting have not been exhausted are not eligible for placement in the Behavior Change Program.

Placement in the Behavior Change Program is initiated by a referral by the home school, based on an initial staffing, and the concurrence of the parents. At this time, parents are required to agree to attend the weekly parent meetings. The

final selection is made by a District Screening Committee based on the information contained in the referral packet.

The Behavior Change Program consists of three components: a) diagnostic classroom, b) weekly parent meetings, and c) home school teacher inservice/training. In addition, consultants from the Behavior Change Program will confer with the teacher and school staff regarding the need for change in educational/behavioral prescriptions. The Behavior Change Program attempts to exit the student in seventy-five instructional days or less. The maximum time that a student may remain in the Behavior Change Program is 180 instructional days.

Progress through the Behavior Change Program is based on the Level System, which is a behavior management system based on the Level System at Sunset School which serves students classified as Socially-Emotionally Disturbed (SED), and adapted for specific use in the Behavior Change Program. The Behavior Change Program staff suggest that Level 4 and 5 students can function successfully, behaviorally and academically, in a regular classroom. A previous evaluation has found that there was a considerable difference in behavioral success following return to the home school between those students who returned after achieving Level 4 or higher and those that did not.

The Behavior Change Program has the goal of reducing disruptive behavior in the elementary school setting by identifying and developing techniques for the effective management of academic and behavioral patterns of behavior-disordered children. Specific objectives include:

1. To combine the efforts of the parents, home school personnel, Behavior Change Program staff, and the community in order to provide appropriate means of dealing with the disruptive behavior of individual students.
2. To develop a selection of methods for teachers to use to deal with disruptive behaviors.
3. To train teachers in the use of specific techniques and strategies with specific students.
4. To provide ongoing consultation to teachers.
5. To provide positive changes, not a cure, in the students exiting the program.
6. To provide inservice training.

### **Evaluation Methodology**

Data were collected through a review of project, school, and district records and observations of activities at Nova Blanche Forman. Interviews were conducted with project staff, school-based, and district administrators. A survey was developed and administered to principals who had students returning from the

Behavior Change Program during either the current or prior academic year. A survey was designed and administered to teachers of students who had returned from the Behavior Change Program during the current academic year. An additional survey was designed and administered to teachers of students who had returned from the Behavior Change Program during the previous academic year. A structured telephone interview was conducted with a random sample of twenty parents (out of 160) who had children that participated in the Behavior Change Program during the current or previous academic year. The project coordinator provided the results of the evaluations for the four teacher workshops that have been held during the first part of this academic year.

This evaluation was designed to address the following key evaluation questions:

- A. To what extent have the goals and objectives of the program been met?
- B. To what extent have the recommendations of the previous evaluation been addressed?
- C. What has been the impact and utility of the project from the perspective of parents, teachers, and school administrators?

### **Data Collection Outcomes**

#### Interview Results: Program Staff

The program staff have great enthusiasm for the project, feel good about their participation, and have made changes in the program as a result of the previous evaluation and their own observations. They feel that the program has achieved a "70% success rate" with the students that have participated in the program. Given that the students selected for participation are the ones for which no other support mechanism has worked, they feel that this is a notable achievement.

The program staff requested the option to remove the 90 day limit and have the ability to extend the program to 180 days based on a staff decision regarding "what is best for the child." Students are now mainstreamed into regular Blanche Forman classes at Level 4 while in the program in order for the staff to be able to monitor more closely the child's adaptation in a regular classroom setting. The frequency of follow-up visits in the home school has been increased. A Level Review Board, consisting of Level 5 students, teachers, and staff has been instituted to review the performance, and recommended level changes, for those students who have demonstrated significant behavioral aberrations. The participation of the Level 5 students on this board has proven to be a great success, reinforcing the "role model" responsibilities of the "advanced" children.

The staff reports that the greatest problem that they have encountered is the lack of full parental participation, which they feel is a key element for the success of the program. They report that approximately 10% of the parents are "sufficiently active." They feel that parents routinely sign the initial referral agreement agreeing to participate in the weekly parent meetings. However, staff feel that

the parents do not truly intend to participate and that staff have no clout to require participation. They report difficulty in tying the program into the Middle School and feel that there is a potential problem in the second year with the child progressing to the classroom of an untrained teacher.

The staff feels that some schools have overly high expectations about the amount of change that a child will demonstrate, that the program will "miraculously" transform a problem child to a model of appropriate behavior. They would like the home school more involved with the child during their stay in the program to help them feel that they are still a part of the home school. This could be accomplished by sending letters, newsletters, stories, etc. They need more materials from the home school on an appropriate level for the child (some schools tend to send grade level materials rather than materials appropriate to the child's ability level). They have begun to observe the phenomenon of students wishing to return to the supportive atmosphere of the program and intentionally becoming disruptive in order to be sent back. The program is eagerly anticipating the installation of the elementary computer aided instruction lab.

#### Interview Results: Parents

**Table 1**  
**Parent Survey Results**  
(N= 20)

Question	Yes	Somewhat	No
Were you fully informed of the home school's decision to refer your child to the program?	90%		10%
Were you supportive of this referral?	75%	15%	10%
Were you able to attend the parent meetings?	60%		40%
Did you find that the child's behavior improved as a result of participating in the behavior change program?	50%	25%	25%
	Positive	Ambivalent	Negative
What are your overall feelings about the program?	70%	5%	25%
	Yes	Unsure	No
Would you recommend that the program be continued?	70%	5%	25%

While an attempt was made to perform a random sampling of parents, an inescapable bias was introduced into the results by the fact that some parents were unavailable at the phone number contained in the program records. This group, therefore, was excluded from the sampling plan.

The majority (70%) of parents/guardians were positive about the program and recommend that it be continued. Most of the parents feel that their children have "fallen through the cracks" in the Broward County school system. These children are not emotionally handicapped nor suffering from learning problems and until the Behavior Change Program there was no formal intervention for children with behavioral problems.

Children with teachers at the home school who have been trained in the Behavior Change Program methods seem to have better long-term results from the program. Using the daily home note system seems to be effective for some students when they return to the home school.

Some parents feel that the parenting meetings were effective, while, for some these types of parenting classes were redundant. They have already been through several types of training sessions, all with different programs. These parents still seemed to welcome the meetings and contact with other parents. Several expressed the opinion that the meetings should be mandatory for parents/guardians of attending children and that without this stipulation the meetings were not as effective as they could be.

Many felt that the program was too short. One parent expressed the opinion that a flexible schedule should be utilized dependent on the child's status in the program. The majority of children appeared to have behavioral improvement in the program, these changes tended to produce a lasting effect on some and not on others. For those where the change did not persist, the parents would prefer a longer time in the program hoping that more exposure would increase the likelihood of longer-term behavior change in the children.

Most of the parents were cooperative in the interview process and were appreciative that the school board was taking the time to inquire about their opinions.



## Survey Results: Principals

**Table 2**  
**Principal Survey Results**  
(N= 51)

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
I understood the goals of the Behavior Change Program.	49%	49%	2%		
I understood the referral procedure.	45%	49%	4%	2%	
I feel that the goals of the Behavior Change Program have been met in regard to my school.	6%	41%	27%	16%	10%
The training component of the program prepared us for the return of the students to my school.	14%	41%	23%	14%	8%
The training provided my teachers with additional behavior management knowledge and techniques.	20%	46%	14%	16%	4%
I have observed that the knowledge gained in the Behavior Change training has helped my teachers in g with other students.	10%	41%	25%	18%	6%
The Behavior Change staff were available for consultation on an "as needed" basis.	18%	48%	24%	8%	2%
I have observed a positive change in the behavior of students that participated in the Behavior Program..	5%	38%	15%	20%	22%
I feel that the Behavior Change Program should be continued.	44%	38%	14%	4%	

The principals were, in general, positive in their remarks concerning the Behavior Change Program. They felt that the goals of the program were met in about half of the cases. The most frequent comment was a call for elimination of the 90 day limit, followed closely by a suggestion that the transition to a regular classroom be monitored more closely by the Behavior Change staff, perhaps at the host school. These comments reflect a need to communicate the recent changes in the program made in order to accommodate these concerns.

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The principals also reflected on the need for training for the "next year teacher" who has the graduate from the program but has not had the benefit of the training provided the original teacher. They also mentioned a need to involve parents more fully in the program. They expressed the need for some solution for those students for whom the Behavior Change Program is not successful.

### Survey Results: Teachers - Current Year Students

**Table 3.**  
**Teacher Survey Results - Current Year Students**  
(N=28)

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
I understood the goals of the Behavior Change Program.	61%	39%			
I understood the referral procedure.	48%	34%	11%	7%	
I feel that the goals of the Behavior Change Program have been met in regard to this student.	29%	18%	24%	21%	18%
The training component of the program prepared me for the return of the student into my classroom.	14%	50%	29%	7%	
The training provided me with behavior management knowledge and techniques.	21%	54%	14%	11%	
The Behavior Change training provided me with a bank of strategies to use when this student returned classroom.	11%	67%	15%	7%	
I have found that the knowledge gained in the Behavior Change training has helped me in dealing with other students in my classroom.	25%	50%	11%	11%	4%
The Behavior Change staff were available for consultation on an "as needed" basis.	37%	44%	19%		
I can see a positive change in this student's behavior since his return to my classroom.	12%	24%	16%	24%	24%
The student's academic performance has improved since his return to my classroom.	8%	28%	44%	8%	12%
I feel more able to deal with this child in a productive manner since his/her participation in the Behavior Change program	17%	33%	13%	33%	4%
I feel that the Behavior Change Program should be continued.	57%	22%	21%		

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Teachers of current year Behavior Change students were generally supportive of the program and felt that it had been helpful. Again, they felt that the goals of the program had been met in approximately half of the cases and were positive regarding the results of the training component. The most common comments pertained to the frequent need for students to remain in the program for more than 90 days (some suggested a year) and for a method to ease the transition from the program to a regular classroom with 30 students and one teacher. Again, there is a need to communicate the programmatic changes allowing for longer periods in the program and the mainstreaming into Nova classrooms while still in the program.

The teachers in general felt that the training program was helpful, requesting more assistance in planning for 30 students while dealing with one or more behavior problems. They requested, in a limited number of cases, training for administrators who appear not to be sufficiently supportive of a teacher's attempts to apply the techniques taught. Some teachers suggested a reduction of the observation time while others felt that additional training and practice would be helpful. This apparent contradiction can be interpreted as indicating that teachers, as well, enter the program with differing skills and needs and that the training program should be responsive to these diverse needs.

A significant correlation was found between the exit level of the student and the response to the question "I feel more able to deal with this child in a productive manner ..." with higher exit levels corresponding to higher levels of agreement with this statement ( $r = .58$ ). There was also a significant correlation between the number of times that the student was placed in the "Think About Behavior" (TAB) room and responses to this question. Higher number of placements in this isolation room were related to lower levels of agreement with the statement ( $r = -.53$ ).

# Survey Results: Teachers - Prior Year Students

**Table 4**  
**Teacher Survey Results - Prior Year Students**  
(N=38)

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
I understand the goals of the Behavior Change Program.	22%	51%	22%	5%	
I feel that the goals of the Behavior Change Program have been met in regard to this student.	3%	14%	25%	33%	25%
I have received training or information on techniques that "work with this child".	6%	39%	8%	33%	14%
This student's behavior has been appropriate in my class.	11%	14%	46%	29%	
This student's academic performance is average or above when comparing him/her with his/her peers.	6%	33%	8%	22%	31%
I have not required additional assistance in behavior management with this child.	3%	9%	14%	40%	34%
The Behavior Change staff were available for consultation on an "as needed" basis to me.	3%	35%	30%	16%	16%
I have found that the knowledge gained from the Behavior Change Program has helped me in dealing her students in my classroom.	3%	22%	33%	28%	14%
I recommend that the Behavior Change Program be continued.	20%	40%	40%		

The teachers of prior year Behavior Change clients were generally less positive about the results of the program but retained their positive impression about the program itself including the training component. They felt that the goals of the program had been met in approximately one-fifth of the cases. They overwhelmingly suggested that the provision of training, information about the student, and continued follow-up on the part of the Behavior Change staff was desired. These teachers, again, strongly expressed the feeling that 90 days was

frequently insufficient, that students should not be released from the program until they reached Level 5 satisfactorily, and that the transition to a 'regular' class should be facilitated at Nova in preparation for the return to the home school. A significant correlation was found between the number of times that the student was placed in the "Think About Behavior" (TAB) room and the response to the question "I feel the goals of the Behavior Change Program have been met in regard to this student" with higher numbers of placements corresponding to lower levels of agreement with this statement ( $r = -.45$ ).

### Teacher Workshop Evaluation Results

The tabulated results of the teacher workshops held during the first half of the 1991-92 school year are contained in the Appendix. These results confirm the findings in the teacher surveys that these workshops were perceived to be of excellent quality and very helpful.

### **Evaluation Question Results**

#### **A. To what extent have the goals and objectives of the program been met?**

The goal of the program (reduction of disruptive behavior) appears to have been met with a success rate, reported by principals and teachers, of about 50%. The discrepancy between this rate and the staff's estimation of a 70% success rate may be due to the differences in expectations and the difference between performance in the program and performance following the shock of returning to a much different home school environment. Concern has been raised regarding the need for continual monitoring of these children into the following year. The results of the teacher training aspects of the program have been met with consistently favorable reports. The parent and community involvement objectives have not been met with particular success.

#### **B. To what extent have the recommendations of the previous evaluation been addressed?**

The staff of the Behavior Change Program have been particularly responsive to constructive recommendations. The changes in the program outlined in the summary above were made, in part, in response to the recommendations of the previous evaluation. The staff has been struggling with the recommendation to address the structure of the parent training component, but has not yet developed a successful model.

#### **C. What has been the impact and utility of the project from the perspective of parents, teachers, and school administrators?**

The majority of parents (70%), principals (82%), teachers of current year students (79%), and teachers of prior year students (60%) have found the program to be sufficiently effective to recommend that it be continued.

Many respondents expressed the opinion that it should be expanded. Approximately 80% of teachers who have participated in the training sessions report that they have gained a bank of strategies that they can utilize in their classrooms. Approximately 70% of the principals feel that the training provided teachers with additional behavior management knowledge and over 50% have observed that knowledge benefiting other students as well.

### Summary

The Behavior Change Program appears to have identified and begun to meet a significant need in regard to elementary school students. There is, reportedly, a growing number of students who have such serious behavioral problems that the support mechanisms at the home school cannot deal with them. As some parents have expressed, these students previously "fell through the cracks." The Behavior Change Program provides one last ditch effort of assisting these students in gaining the self-control mechanisms necessary for success in the school environment and of providing training for teachers and parents in reinforcing these mechanisms. Given the selection criteria, a success rate of 50% (as reported by principals and teachers) should be seen as quite an accomplishment. These rates should go up as the results of the recent changes in the program have a change to take effect (increased time for students who need it and initial mainstreaming at Nova).

There is evidence that there are significant indicators of the potential success of students after they return to the home school (e.g., exit level and number of TAB referrals). These indicators, along with other numerical and observational indicators, can form a set of exit criteria when determining when a child should be returned to the home school. There is some anecdotal evidence that there may be identifiable characteristics of children who benefit, in a long-term manner, by the Behavior Change Program.

## References

Kaufman, M. & Center, D. *Administrators Rank Discipline Problems - Common and Serious*, NASSP Bulletin. (March, 1992) p. 116-119.